

Bernadeta Raczkiewicz

METAPHORS

1. Uwagi ogólne

Tekst *Metaphors* jest adresowany do studentów filologii polskiej lub innych filologii oraz kierunków humanistycznych, z zamiłowaniem do czytania literatury i zainteresowanych tematyką zjawisk zachodzących w języku (literackim i nie tylko).

2. Poziom zaawansowania: B2+/C1

3. Czas trwania opisanych ćwiczeń: 30–45 minut (z dyskusją)

4. Cele dydaktyczne

Celem ćwiczeń jest zapoznanie studentów z zagadnieniem użycia metafor we współczesnym języku, również codziennym, na kilku przykładach zaczerpniętych z języka angielskiego oraz uwrażliwienie na zasady poprawnego użycia metafor w tekstach (na przykładach *mixed metaphors* o różnym poziomie złożoności). Może to być uzupełnienie tematyki zjawisk zachodzących w języku.

5. Uwagi i sugestie

Prowadzący powinien pogrupować studentów w pary, ewentualnie grupy trzyosobowe, aby umożliwić dyskusję, porównywanie wniosków i współpracę nad odpowiedziami. W każdym zespole udostępniamy jeden słownik (najlepiej bez wersji polskiej).

Warto także poświęcić czas na dyskusję w ćwiczeniu 8 – może ona stanowić ciekawą okazję do wymiany poglądów na temat poprawnego i niepoprawnego użycia metafor w języku literackim i codziennym. Warto wypisać podawane przez studentów przykłady na tablicy – inni studenci nauczą się w ten sposób kilku interesujących wyrażen.

FROM THE REAL WORLD TO METAPHORICAL MEANING

1. Read the sentence below. What are the possible meanings of “walk back”?

“I am a slow walker,” Abraham Lincoln once said, “but I never walk back.”

2. In pairs, discuss:

1. What is
 - a. the literal meaning,
 - b. the figurative (metaphorical) meaning?
2. What is a metaphor?

3. The words below originally meant real-life things or concepts. With time, they gained metaphorical meaning. Can you guess in what way can their meaning be metaphorical?

backlog benchmark hotbed lame thrill watershed

4. Read the texts below and match the words from exercise 3 to gaps in the text. The same word fits all gaps in a given text.

TEXT 1

“Right now, I’m facing a huge of work”

In colonial days, Americans did all they could to keep the fires in their fireplaces burning overnight, so as not to waste precious matches to relight the fires the next morning. A householder would place an enormous log, as much as two-feet thick, into the back of the fireplace. This “.....” would burn all night, providing embers to rekindle the fire the next morning.

By the early 1900s, when people started heating their homes with central furnaces, the original meaning of “.....” had begun to fade. But the term soon took on two metaphoric meanings: “**a reserve supply or source**” and “**an accumulation of unfinished work.**”

TEXT 2

a “..... of revolution,” a “..... of terrorism”

It’s funny; we use this word so often, but few of us ever think about its origin. Because “.....” usually implies something dangerous or intense, you might guess that it’s derived from hot coals or flaming beds.

Surprisingly, it comes instead from the relatively cool and tranquil enterprise of gardening. A is a framed bed of earth enclosed in glass to keep young plants warm in the spring.

The word soon took on the metaphoric meaning of “**a place that provides a fertile environment for the rapid growth or expansion of an idea or enterprise.**” It occurs most frequently in negative contexts, but has recently gained some positive connotations as well: “a of comedy,” “a jazz”.

TEXT 3

Enthusiastic people often experience a “.....”

The word originally meant “to pierce or bore a hole.” Credit William Shakespeare for introducing the metaphorical meaning of **being pierced by emotion**, as when his character Juliet says, “I have a faint cold fears through my veins.”

TEXT 4

Is a “.....” a river basin? Or is it the dividing line between two river basins?

Amazingly enough, it’s both.

A literal translation of the German “wasserscheide” (“water divide”) — its first meaning in English was a line along a region’s hilltops or mountaintops separating the waters flowing into different river basins. Then, its meaning expanded the slope down which water flows from the divide and, later, to denote **the entire gathering ground of a water system**. Just as the word “frontier” initially meant a border between two countries but soon came to indicate the entire area near the border, so “.....” evolved to mean **the whole region on one side of the divide**.

But when people today use the word metaphorically to mean “turning point” or “crossroads,” they’re thinking of the original meaning of “.....” — a dividing line.

TEXT 5

What is a “.....?”

This term originated in the science of surveying. To determine the exact elevation of a point, surveyors make a cut or mark on a fixed object, such as a rock or wall, and then use that cut to secure an angle iron. This cut or mark is called a “.....” because the angle iron serves as a platform or bench for mounting measuring equipment.

This is then used as a reference point for all other measurements, hence its figurative meaning as a standard of quality. The verb “.....” means “**to study a competitor’s products or practices in order to compare them with one’s own.**”

TEXT 6

“.....” – First used as a term of disparagement favored by teenagers. Does “.....” to mean “inferior” show disrespect for people who have difficulty walking?

No. “.....” crossed over into metaphorical use (to mean **poor or faulty**) long ago, as in “..... excuse” and “..... attempt.”

Source: <http://www.creators.com/lifestylefeatures/words-and-trivia/rob-kyff-word-guy/sleeping-like-a-log-in-a-hotbed.html>; http://articles.courant.com/2007-09-07/features/0709070422_1_ear-marks-and-benchmarks-mark-hopkins-term, access: 7 March, 2016; <https://www.creators.com/lifestylefeatures/words-and-trivia/rob-kyff-word-guy/hopefully-none-of-us-are-confused.html>; <http://www.creators.com/lifestylefeatures/words-and-trivia/rob-kyff-word-guy/shedding-light-on-landscape.html>; http://articles.courant.com/2006-01-17/features/0601170632_1_pluck-thrills-and-chills-latin, access: 7 March, 2016.

5. In pairs, decide if the following sentences are true or false.

1. *Backlog* refers to comparing one concept to another.
2. The word *backlog* originally denoted fuel wood.
3. The term *hotbed* comes from gardening.
4. *Hotbed* used to mean a glass house for growing plants, heated by burning embers.
5. *Thrill* can also be used as a verb.
6. *Watershed* now has a much narrower literal meaning than it used to have in the past.
7. The metaphorical meaning of *watershed* is broader than the literal meaning.
8. *Benchmark* originated in technical language.
9. *Benchmark* in the metaphorical sense can now be used in the business context.
10. The meaning of *lame* is always positive.

MIXED METAPHORS

6. Read the following text and describe, in your own words, what a *mixed metaphor* is.

Untangling the Metaphor Stew

By Rob Kyff

“Pfizer Game Plan Unleashing Whirlwind.” This ambitious newspaper headline manages to cram three metaphors into just five words, whisking us energetically from sports to runaway dogs to meteorology.

“This isn’t just a mixed metaphor,” wrote the who mailed it to me. “It’s a veritable metaphor stew, if I may add to the mix by borrowing from the language of cookery.”

A stew it is, but a tasty one at that. As much as I know I should be condemning mixed metaphors for their illogical juxtapositions, I can’t help admiring the headlong exuberance of their creators.

Quotation 1 – A corporate executive:

“This proposal puts orthodontic pressure on the issue. We’re still waiting to see the other shoe drop.”

Quotation 2 – a financial writer, about the importance of examining a company carefully before acquiring it:

“Research will perhaps never again be seen as the province of those panning for gold, but as today’s movers and shakers show, it can still put bread on the table.”

Quotation 3 – From business language:

“For any young company, capital is like mother’s milk, the sustenance needed for growth. A captive audience of attentive financiers offered hope for a long, cool drink.”

Quotation 4 – From a letter to a local newspaper, a reader angry about the fall of a local opera company, explaining why people shouldn’t subscribe to other local arts organizations:

“We don’t want to be left holding the bag if this is the tip of the iceberg of a death spiral of performing arts locally.”

Quotation 5 – a town official speaking about a group that exploited a loophole in the zoning law:

“They had one bite of the apple, so to speak, and this is just a way of going in through another door.”

Quotation 6 – From a newspaper:

“This would open another door in Pandora’s box.”

Quotation 7 – From the novel *Case Histories* by Kate Atkinson:

“So that she could at least understand the etymology of words, to follow them back down their limbs and trunks until she reached their roots.”

Quotation 8 – from a newspaper story about Idaho’s Salmon River:

“These creeks roared down the canyon sides and charged into the Salmon with the energy and excitement of children bursting in from the outdoors.”

Source: <http://www.creators.com/lifestylefeatures/words-and-trivia/rob-kyff-word-guy/untangling-the-metaphor-stew.html>; http://articles.courant.com/2009-04-07/news/words0407_1_piping-plover-pool-table-primaries, access: 7 March, 2016; <http://www.creators.com/lifestylefeatures/words-and-trivia/rob-kyff-word-guy/summer-blooms-from-the-prose-garden.html>, access: 12 February, 2013.

7. Use a dictionary or the Internet to find out the metaphorical meaning of the following sentences. How many metaphors can you identify in each quotation? What do they mean?

8. In pairs or small groups, discuss the following issues.

1. Which of the mixed metaphors quoted above do you like best? Why?
2. Which of the mixed metaphors seems illogical, or difficult to follow?
3. What advice would you give to writers about using mixed metaphors?
4. Do you remember other metaphors that frequently appear in language? Have any particular metaphors drawn your attention before?

KEY

1. “Walk back” can be understood as *go back on a word / withdraw a promise / change one’s mind*.
2.
 - 1a. walk backwards, take steps backwards
 - 1b. go back on a word / withdraw a promise / change one’s mind
2. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance, as in “A mighty fortress is our God.”

Source: Dictionary.com, access: 12 February, 2013.

3. SS’ own answers
4. 1 – backlog, 2 – hotbed, 3 – thrill, 4 – watershed, 5 – benchmark, 6 – lame
5. 1F, 2T, 3T, 4F, 5T, 6F, 7F, 8T, 9T, 10F
6. SS’ own answers. The definition of a mixed metaphor is as follows:
the use in the same expression of two or more metaphors that are incongruous or illogical when combined, as in “The president will put the ship of state on its feet.”
7.
 1. Put orthodontic pressure on sth → someone’s shoe drop as a result of something.
 2. Mining for gold → moving and shaking the pan in search for gold → actions that give you means to live on.
 3. Nursing a young company like a child → sustenance and a possibility of development being offered from attentive financiers. In this case the writer failed to recognize the illogical extensions of a single metaphor.
 4. Being left with a difficult situation → a situation whose implications are not all visible → flying with no chance of survival.

Be left holding the bag (*American idiom*) to suddenly have to deal with a difficult problem because someone else has decided they do not want to deal with it.

Tip of the iceberg – *Fig.* only the part of something that can be easily observed, but not the rest of it, which is hidden. (Referring to the fact that the majority of an iceberg is below the surface of the water.)

Death spiral – a spiral dive, a terminal situation in flying.

Source: the freedictionary.com, access: 12 February, 2013.

5. Enjoying part of something → finding another possibility to access something.
6. Granting access to something → the myth of Pandora who opened a jar to release the evils of mankind.
7. Following the etymology of words → the anatomy of a plant, looked at in the direction from leaves to roots.
8. Creeks rapidly flowing and joining other creeks → the youthful energy of children coming in from outside.
8. SS’ own answers.